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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002195

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND DRL: S.JOSEPH  
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER  
CJTF-HOA AND USCENCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2017  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [ET](#)  
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: ELDERS ANTICIPATE JULY 16 AMNESTY  
ANNOUNCEMENT FOR CUD DETAINEES

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 01420 AND PREVIOUS  
[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 02137 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: SEAN CELY, ACTING POL-ECON COUNSELOR.  
Reason: 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Professor Ephraim Isaac, the lead negotiator from the team of Ethiopian Elders working on release of the CUD detainees, has returned to Addis Ababa for the conclusion of the trial, and the anticipated pardon announcement by the GoE. During a July 12 meeting with PM Meles, Ephraim was told that the groundwork had already been laid for the detainees' release, there was no turning back, and that the amnesty process would begin immediately after sentencing on July 16. Since the prosecutor's recommendation of the death sentence on July 9 (ref B), international attention has refocused on the CUD trial. Post is urging an immediate release of the prisoners and for both sides to begin the process of reconciliation once the judicial process has come to a conclusion. END SUMMARY.

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CHIEF ELDER RETURNS TO ADDIS FOR EXPECTED RELEASE  
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[1](#)2. (C) Ephraim, who is based in Princeton, New Jersey, has been shuttling back and forth to Ethiopia to lead his team of Elders in an effort to find a settlement that would allow the release of the political detainees who have been in prison for the past 19 months on charges of &Outrages Against the Constitution,8 among others (ref A). He was asked by Prime Minister Meles during his last visit to return to Addis Ababa for the week of July 9, as the 38 defendants who had been convicted on June 11 were due to receive their final sentencing from the High Court on July 9. It was anticipated that soon after, the GoE would announce an amnesty, which would be followed by an official statement from the Elders, by the Department, and by Post. Ephraim arrived on July 6 in anticipation of this event. However, July 9 proved not to be the final hearing, which has been postponed to July 16 (ref B).

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MEETING WITH MELES RESTORES EPHRAIM'S CONFIDENCE  
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¶2. (C) On July 12, following a week of meetings with numerous individuals involved in the CUD trial, from lawyers and defense advocates, to top-level GoE officials, including PM Meles, Ephraim provided Ambassador a briefing on stakeholders' attitudes regarding the trial and what might be expected following the expected conclusion of the trial for the convicted detainees on July 16.

¶3. (C) While Ephraim was quite concerned earlier in the week when the bench, contrary to expectations, did not conclude the trial, he was much more upbeat following his July 12 meeting with PM Meles. He recounted how PM Meles "poured his heart out" to him in their meeting, treating him like a confidant and "father figure." PM Meles lamented to him how difficult it had been to keep the hard-liners in his party at bay. He told Ephraim that many of them felt that the GoE should not interfere in the trial, even after the sentencing, and should let stand whatever sentence was passed. Many in his party were illiterate, PM Meles said, and who were not as sophisticated as he would like them to be. In the end, however, the PM assured Ephraim that the party had already voted on the matter, approving the release after much pressure from the PM, and that there was "no turning back." The PM expressed disappointment that the trial had not concluded on July 9, and asked Ephraim to stay an additional week, assuring him that July 16 would be the last day.

¶4. (C) On July 16, after the bench issues a verdict (which the PM said would be finished by noon), the PM's office is to contact the Ministry of Justice to inform them that an application for amnesty is in process. Ephraim said that such a process may take some time, however, as such things "can get bogged down in bureaucracy." Ambassador stressed that the amnesty process must be swift and the detainees released very soon after the verdict, and that an

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announcement about their impending release should be made the same day of the sentencing. Ephraim said that he would attempt to contact the PM before July 16 to discuss the matter of timing.

¶5. (C) Ephraim also assured the Ambassador that the prosecution's appeal would be dropped once the amnesty process was announced. Ambassador urged this to be done as quickly as possible as well, as a return of the genocide charge would counter any goodwill gained from the detainees' release.

¶6. (C) On July 11, Julian Filochowski, the hired advocate for the civil society defendants Daniel Netsanet and Netsanet Demissie (two of the nine defendants not yet convicted), provided Professor Ephraim with a copy of a statement that these two detainees would be willing to sign in exchange for their release. (NOTE: Ephraim reports that 59 defendants in the CUD trials of Hailu Shawel et al and Kifle Tigneh et al have signed the statement approved by the government. Only Daniel and Netsanet refused, on grounds that they are not part of the CUD and never took part in organizing civil disobedience. END NOTE.) Ephraim reported that PM Meles anxiously read this letter during their July 12 meeting, but refused to accept it as sufficient for release, saying that &the same formula applies to them as the rest,8 indicting that they must sign the same statement as the 59 others.

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COMMENT: ALL EYES ON GOE ) AND ELDERS - AS SENTENCING LOOMS  
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¶7. (C) The most recent one-week delay in the long-anticipated end of the CUD trial frustrated family members of the detainees and international observers alike. The prosecution's recommendation for the death sentence for the 38 convicted political prisoners has created a great deal of press and has refocused international attention on the trial.

Professor Ephraim has been working feverishly in his most recent, and hopefully last, visit to Addis Ababa to understand the thinking on both sides as the trial nears its climax. Nearly all the detainees have signed a statement of regret, which had been drafted by the Elders and approved by the GoE, and PM Meles assures Ephraim that there is no turning back now that he and his party have agreed to release the detainees after their sentencing. The question of exactly when they walk out of prison remains fundamental, with the PM saying that the amnesty application will be submitted on July 16 (following the trial), but that this must clear the bureaucracy. Post, in an effort to deflect any future negative press on the matter, are urging the Elders and the GoE to expedite this process and to bring the 19-month ordeal to quick conclusion.

18. (C) The release is a miracle because few, including the EU and various human rights groups, believed it was possible. It has taken so long to convince the GoE to release the detainees, that now human rights groups, the diaspora, and the press are all focused on the Ogaden and the GoE's fight with insurgents.

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